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ABSTRACT

This book focuses on what it feels like and what it means to spend substantial portions of one's everyday life in the chat rooms, support groups, and virtual communities of cyberspace. Interviewing heavy users online, and becoming one herself, the author creates and ethnographic site for inquiring into the meanings of life online, a place where she and her readers can witness for themselves the social practices that are transforming the meanings of identity, intimacy, and community. It is simultaneously a description of what the author encountered, an analysis of some of the texts (people) encountered, and an analysis of the project itself. The first chapter "Going Online" describes the author's experiences of going and being online and accomplishing the initial stages of the project. Some of the language and terminology used with certain technologies are also introduced. The second chapter "The Shifting Project, The Shifting Self" address some methodological issues related to studying this shifting ethnographic site. The third chapter "Themes of Life in Cyberspace" discusses three themes that helped the author understand some of the ways users experience and frame online communication. It discusses how users: (1) frame; (2) experience; and (3) why they use, go to, or exist through and with computer-mediated communication. Chapters 4 "Stories of Tools and Places" and 5, "Stories of Places and Ways of Being," present extensive excerpts of conversations with the participants and apply the themes developed in the third chapter to an analysis of these interviews. In the concluding chapter 6 "Reflecting" the author contemplates her experiences [illegible] online communication, her goals, the project, and the future. In addition to these six chapters, other elements, or "Interludes," that are essential to the telling of the story are included. Contains an index. (AEF)